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## **‘Right to Read Act’ Passes House Committee, Bringing Illinois One Step Closer to Tackling Literacy Crisis**

**Springfield** – The Right to Read Act, HB5032 (Mayfield), passed in the House Elementary & Secondary Education: School Curriculum & Policies Committee. Today’s vote in support of the bill signals continued momentum behind the bill as advocates and legislators eye next steps to advance the legislation.

“I’m a former middle school teacher, and one thing I know is that kids really want to learn,” said Brandi Watts, a member of the Coalition. “When they struggle with reading, they disengage and then we lose them. The science and data are clear on the best ways to teach children to read, and I think we owe it to them to do this very important thing in the best way possible. I’m happy to see the Right to Read Act moving forward; the best time to take this step was 20 years ago, but the second-best time is right now.”

With support from literacy advocates, parents, and educators across the state, the Right to Read Act will increase evidence-based literacy instruction across Illinois, addressing the fact that just one-third of Illinois’ fourth-grade students are proficient readers, and another third meet only “basic” reading standards. Most states across the nation have taken steps to embrace evidence-based literacy instruction, but Illinois has not – yet. The time is now to join that growing list of states working to improve reading outcomes for their students and enact the Right to Read Act.

“Two-thirds of Illinois students struggle to read, but decades of research tells us that 95% of children can learn to read if evidence-based instruction is used in the classroom,” said Louise Dechovitz, Vice President of Avoca School District 37 and a member of the Coalition. “The State should not be a bystander in this effort. To expect Illinois’ 800+ school districts to find the time and money to figure this out on their own, one by one, is unsustainable. This approach would further exacerbate the inequities that exist in our system. Illinois should join the growing ranks of states who understand that childhood literacy is not a nice-to-have, but an essential right for all and key to the future of Illinois. Enacting the Right to Read Act would do just that.”

At its heart, the literacy crisis is one of educational equity. Parents of struggling readers whose schools do not provide evidence-based instruction often seek tutoring support outside of

school, which can cost a family thousands of dollars. The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that students who are not proficient readers by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their proficient-reading peers. The Prison Literacy Foundation found that most prison inmates and youth involved in the juvenile justice system have difficulty reading.

The House bill is sponsored by State Rep. Rita Mayfield (D–Waukegan), who has championed literacy reform efforts for many years and recently elevated the issue at the Black Caucus Education Pillar negotiations. Those negotiations were led by State Senator Kimberly A. Lightford (D–Maywood), Majority Leader of the Illinois Senate and the Senate sponsor of the Right to Read Act. Sponsors and proponents committed to continuing conversations with stakeholders and drafting an amendment to enhance literacy instruction for English learners. They will also work to ensure that requirement for teacher candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of reading foundations is structured in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

The [Right to Read Act factsheet can be found here](#). Learn more about the Illinois Early Literacy Coalition online at [ilearlyliteracy.org](http://ilearlyliteracy.org). In addition, succinct video [interview clips from several coalition members are available here](#).

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***Illinois Early Literacy Coalition*** strives to improve public policy and funding to empower educators with the tools to provide evidence-based literacy instruction – both for the whole class and for targeted intervention – that explicitly, systematically, and sequentially addresses the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.